DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 130 174 CG 006 900

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TITLE Supervision and Evaluation of Paraprofessionals.
PUB DATE May 71
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association (Denver, Colorado, May 1971)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Evaluation; Literature Reviews; Objectives; *Paraprofessional Personnel; *Performance Factors; *Role Theory; Speeches; *Supervision

ABSTRACT

At a time when many agencies are suffering a cutback in funds, and money for new and innovative programs is limited, the use of more paraprofessionals in the helping professions can be very important. Professionals and administrators involved in program planning should carefully assess the contribution of paraprofessionals to the program. By using ingenuity and creativity, new roles for paraprofessionals can be found and services expanded and improved. The increased use of paraprofessionals is an important step in meeting the manpower needs of the helping professions. This paper looks briefly at several general methods for evaluating the role and functions of paraprofessionals. (Author/CKJ)

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SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION OF PARAPROFESSIONALS [1]

Lucinda E. Thomas

Two important aspects of an overall paraprofessional program are supervision and evaluation. The type of supervision provided, and the nature of the supervisor-supervisee relationship, are somewhat dependent upon the setting in which the paraprofessional is working. Research and evaluation may take many forms and is as diverse as the multitude of programs in which paraprofessionals may work. One need only list the variety of human service areas in which paraprofessionals are employed to understand the difficulties inherent in generalizing about supervision or evaluation. Yet there are commonalities whether the paraprofessional is providing services in a psychiatric setting, a mental health agency, a college or university, or out in the community.

Research and personal experience has strongly indicated the importance of adequate supervision for the paraprofessional. Reissman (1967) has termed these workers the "new marginal men", and they are certainly struggling for an adequate vocational self-concept. Part of this they can attain through their reference group of other paraprofessionals, with part also coming from regular and sensitive supervision. It has been proven important to work with supervisors in terms of re-defining the professional role to allow for a viable role for the paraprofessional. Without a clear understanding of the contributions that each can make, it is easy for the professional to become threatened by the paraprofessional who may well have more skills than he in a specific area.

In most agencies the model for supervision is based on a previously existing administrative structure. With the unique position the paraprofessional holds, it may be necessary to re-examine the purposes and goals of the supervisory process. Much time may be spent in supervision dealing

[1] A paper presented at Rocky Mountain Psychological Assn., May 1971, Denver

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with the details of the program in which the paraprofessional works. Although this may be a necessary task, perhaps of more value would be supervision aimed at enhancing the growth of the paraprofessional.

Supervision may be used as an ongoing training process in which the skills of the paraprofessional are increased, making him a more valuable employee, as well as aiding him to become a more fully functioning person. This can be achieved through the process of receiving feedback from the supervisor regarding the performance of the paraprofessional, and an exploration of the personal qualities of the individual which add or detract from the program goals. The personal growth model of supervision is successful only to the extent that there is completely open communication between professional and paraprofessional. The professional must, of course, be operating at a level somewhat higher than that of the paraprofessional in order to provide him with a growth experience.

Carkhuff (1969) feels that the essence of any human relations program is the ability of the individuals who conduct it to function effectively in the helping role. His model of the five levels of interpersonal functioning is based on the assumption that the helper is functioning at a higher level than the helpee. He states that in effective helping the helpee will ultimately be able to do everything that the helper does and at levels very close to those at which the helper is functioning. Carkhuff's conceptualizations have strong implications for a model of supervision for paraprofessionals.

An important aspect of any paraprofessional program is identification with the peer group. In addition to individual supervision, the paraprofessionals can meet regularly as a group for the purposes of supervision,

training, and evaluation. The members of the peer group can learn much from each other, and the association with the group can help the individual clarify how his role fits in the total program.

Paraprofessional evaluation is generally based on program evaluation. If a program is achieving its goals, it is assumed that the paraprofessional is functioning effectively. Gartner (1969) states that the complexity of human services programs makes evaluation difficult, and that little meaningful evaluation is done of human service programs in general. In studying the New Careers programs, Gartner suggests that evaluations should be made regarding: the effect of the program on the paraprofessional himself, the meeting of the agency's manpower needs, the impact on the agency's service program, the changes in the agency's organization, the effect on training and education for human service workers, and the effect on the community and professional workers.

Sobey (1970) in a study of NIMH programs evaluated paraprofessional services on the dimensions of:

1. contribution of nonprofessional staff to project goal achievement
2. nonprofessional contribution to improvements in service to project population
3. interaction with professional staff, both positive and negative
4. career outcomes for nonprofessionals
5. outcomes of terminated projects

She pointed out the difficulty and complexity of assessing the use of paraprofessionals due to the newness of many programs and the myriad economic and human cost factors involved.

Effectiveness of the service offered by paraprofessional is often

evaluated by: professional ratings, outcome measures (such as attainment of behavioral change goals, changes in self-concept, etc.), client reports, further program development. process evaluation, increased utilization of service. A fruitful method of evaluation is to determine what new services are added as a result of the use of paraprofessionals, and whether the services are extended or improved.

Supervision is the key to an ongoing evaluation program, in which the paraprofessional receives feedback on his performance, and in turn can give his impressions of the job and program to his supervisor. The development of the paraprofessional can be further determined by self-report measures, professional ratings, and behavioral change measures. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the paraprofessional can be made using Carkhuff's levels of interpersonal functioning.

At a time when many agencies are suffering a cutback in funds, and money for new and innovative programs is limited, the use of more paraprofessionals in the helping professions can be very important. Professionals and administrators involved in program planning should carefully assess the contribution of paraprofessionals to the program. By using ingenuity and creativity, new roles for paraprofessionals can be found and services expanded and improved. The increased use of paraprofessionals is an important step in meeting the manpower needs of the helping professions.

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